

ENGLISH 206
FINAL EXAM
SPRING 2002-2003

Name: _____ Section: _____

Instructor: _____ Time Allowed: 2 ½ Hours

PowerPoint: What's wrong with it?
by
REBECCA GANZEL

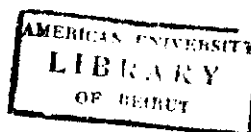
SELECTION A:

1. It's that nightmare again -- the one in which you're trapped in the Electronic Presentation from Hell. The familiar darkness presses in, periodically sliced in half by a fiendish light. Bullet points, about 18 to a slide, swaying in all directions. You cringe, but the slides keep coming, too fast to read, each with a new template you half-remember seeing a hundred times before: Infinite Double-Helices! A typewriter clatters; brakes squeal. Somewhere in the shadows, a voice drones on. Strange stick people shake hands and dance around a flowchart. Typefaces morph into Word Art.
2. In the decade or so since it was introduced, Microsoft PowerPoint has quickly become de rigeur in virtually all business presentations, from the CEO addressing the board of directors to a salesperson touting a new product. "You almost wonder now when you walk into a presentation and someone doesn't use PowerPoint," says Katherine Hutt, who owns a public-relations agency in Virginia. "You want to ask them, 'Are you from the Dark Ages?'"
3. But the very success of electronic presentations has inspired a backlash of sorts. Most companies are reluctant to own up to it, but nearly everyone has heard of a company somewhere that tried to proscribe or limit the use of presentation software, whether by banning it as "too formal" for internal communications, limiting it to the boardroom or going so far as to dictate which colors can and can't be used. In the most famous on-the-record instance, Sun Microsystems' president, Scott McNealy, announced in 1997 that PowerPoint was verboten for his 25,000 employees -- but, *The New York Times* dryly noted last April, "the ban was not enforced."
4. **What's wrong with PowerPoint?** The main argument against electronic presentations is one any teacher would applaud: They divert the attention of both audience and speaker from the presenter's message to what is essentially a series



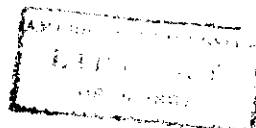
of pictures. The slide show, once peripheral to a presentation (remember "visual aids"?), has become its center, even its reason for being.

5. "No one asks for a memo or a report anymore," *Fortune* reported. "Now it's just, 'Send me your slides.'" When attending a presentation increasingly means sitting in a darkened room with a brightly lit screen, you hardly notice the human being standing beside the screen.
6. The human beings know this, too. McNealy's ostensible reason for banning PowerPoint was that Sun employees were spending too much time preparing slides, presumably at the expense of other kinds of preparation. And he had a point. Like any software program, PowerPoint can be a real time-sucker. If you're a perfectionist -- and what salesperson angling for a multimillion-dollar account can afford not to be? -- you could spend hours reordering your slides, fine-tuning your fonts, resizing your bullets, sampling clip art, experimenting with transitions.
7. "It's like alcohol in the hands of a drunk," says Bill Wheless, an executive trainer and coach in Greenville, S.C., who occasionally has to restrain clients from an overzealous use of PowerPoint. "What we need is moderation."
8. Not that he has anything against presentation software. "I think PowerPoint itself is fabulous -- it does everything that it is designed to do well in the hands of an accomplished presenter," he says. But when an inexperienced person starts using it as a crutch, watch out: "PowerPoint is very user-friendly, but it wants you to sit down and create the whole presentation on PowerPoint." Instead, Wheless says, presenters should choose visuals only after they have a firm idea of what they're going to say.
9. **Why are you up there?** "The presenter's job is to change an audience -- that's why you're up there," says Wheless, who was in broadcasting for 20 years before founding Wheless Communications 10 years ago. "In order to do that, you have to be your driving agent. Your slides [alone] aren't going to accomplish your goal. You should use visuals to support a point, to make it interesting, to show things in a different way, to add emphasis. You need to use them because they make you more persuasive -- not because you can click a button that says Next Slide."
10. Others agree that one of PowerPoint's main problems is, ironically, that it's too easy to use. Katherine Hutt, who has 17 years' experience in public relations ("I started back when it was carousels and overheads"), is president of Nautilus Communications, which she describes as "a virtual agency" in Vienna, Va. She works with clients to bolster internal and external communications, which almost always involves electronic slides.
11. "In inexperienced hands, PowerPoint can be awful," she says. "As with any software, whether it is good or bad has a lot to do with the person sitting behind the keyboard. But it's dangerous -- it makes it too easy to think we're [design]



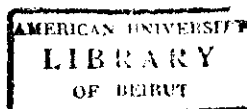
experts." Salespeople and engineers shouldn't be wasting their time fiddling with typefaces and templates, Hutt says: "If you don't have a background in design, go out and hire someone who does."

12. Still, any presentation that goes beyond 10 minutes needs some sort of visuals, she says, "or people will go to sleep." She firmly believes listeners will remember points better if they read them on a screen as well as hear them. And if she can't use PowerPoint for those visuals, she's likely to use none at all, instead using some sort of audience interaction (a quiz, for instance) to break up the monotony.
13. "Whether you're using slides or overheads, they are still a bunch of stagnant images," Hutt says. "I tell my clients, 'Keep it simple, and keep it moving.'" She's strongly in favor of corporate-communications guidelines that limit presenters to a few well-designed templates, arguing that outside presentations are part of a company's corporate identity: "You don't let employees design their own business cards -- there's a productivity issue here."
14. **Appealing to the visual learner** For some people, though, the typical corporate guidelines don't go far enough. If Nick Morgan had his way, for instance, the oft-quoted rule "Use no more than six words per line on a slide" would become "Use no words."
15. "People say, 'I've been told that most people are visual learners,' and they use this as an excuse to visually overwhelm the audience," Morgan says. A Princeton University professor and former speechwriter who edits the *Harvard Management Communication Letter*, a monthly newsletter, he's skeptical of studies that divide people into visual and auditory learners. When you add kinesthetic learners (those who learn through movement) to the mix, he points out, your visual learners are likely to make up no more than 40 percent of your audience.
16. More to the point, "the research shows that visual learners do not learn from words; they learn from pictures -- from very simple, bold images, like circles or rectangles," he says. By contrast, "the vast majority [of PowerPoint slides] are words, maybe with some lousy clip art. What's the visual element there -- the typeface? Are people supposed to admire the Clarendon Bold?"
17. Moreover, by setting up all presentations as a series of slides, "PowerPoint makes bad habits easy," Morgan says. "Ninety-nine percent of speakers just clean up their notes and put them onscreen, so it becomes a crutch for a nervous speaker to get through a presentation. You get the presentation version of Gresham's Law -- bad presentations chasing out good ones."
18. Any good presentation will have the presenter as its prime focus, he says; visuals should be used sparingly and only to reinforce the speaker's credibility. How sparingly? To answer this question, Morgan tells the story of a client who started at a pace of one slide per minute (not unusual in the corporate world, he says) for



a speech that could go up to three hours. After working with him for six months, Morgan gradually pared the client down to one single slide -- albeit one with six pictures that could be highlighted in various ways throughout the speech.

19. If one slide every three hours seems a bit spartan to you, remember that expecting an audience to simultaneously absorb information from the ear and the eye is a demonstrably inefficient way of getting your message across, Morgan says. And when you add another bad habit, printing your slides and handing them out ahead of time, "that's the worst sin -- you're asking your audience to do three things at once."
20. **Your slides are not a handout** In effect, by encouraging users to move seamlessly between notes, slides and handouts, PowerPoint sets up novice speakers to do what most of them want to do anyway: take a back seat to their visuals.
21. "So often people [working with PowerPoint] develop what's really a handout," says Gayle Brickman, a consultant in Milwaukee. "I help them differentiate between a handout and presentation slides." Handouts can provide extensive background, but slides, by contrast, should be brief and to the point; an audience member should be able to get the gist in one glance.
22. "Making slides into your handout is just way too much content," she says. "People think [audience members] like it because it looks good, but most people don't."
23. Brickman began in sales and taught public speaking before founding her company. Along the way, she says, "I started to identify what good speakers did. For a few people, [good speaking] is intuitive, but that's much more rare than people think. Most of the time, it's trial and error. And I was just horror-struck to hear how much time people spend preparing a presentation."
24. To counteract this, she developed a step-by-step series of worksheets that she uses with her clients, called "Prepare to Speak." As Wheeler does, Brickman stresses that visuals, and hence PowerPoint, should come quite late in the process of preparing a speech.
25. "PowerPoint can get you in trouble because it's so much fun," she says. "People are having a good time playing, under the guise of doing work, and they get sidetracked into unimportant issues. Choosing among all the transitions, all the backgrounds -- it's like a video game: 'I'm working on my presentation.'" She thinks that time would be better used going back to the basics -- analyzing what the audience needs to know and crafting a presentation that gets a few key messages across.



26. "The key here is: Does [a visual] aid the clarity of the presentation?" Brickman says. "If it does, use it; if not, throw it out."

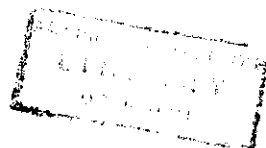
(Ganzel, R. (2000, February 01). PowerPoint: What's wrong with it? *Power pointless.*)

SELECTION B:

And It Makes Phone Calls Too: The Latest Phones May Be Too Smart For Our Own Good

by
H. Asher Bolande

1. When your next mobile phone starts ringing, you might be too busy checking e-mail, playing a video game or flipping through a photo album to actually answer it. At least that's what companies like Samsung, Nokia and Microsoft hope. These firms are now bringing to market the first crop of so-called smart phones--handsets with big screens that can manage data and run a wide variety of programs, just like a miniature personal computer. Research and consulting firm Gartner predicts that smart-phone sales will increase by more than 60% a year until 2006, when sales of the souped-up cell phones are expected to surpass those of standard models.
2. Yes, phone innovations are everywhere: color screens and built-in digital cameras are popping up on lots of new handsets these days. Yet in most cases, these are just add-ons to the basic phone chassis. Smart phones have a whole different level of computing power. Packed with new and more powerful chips, they sport up to 32 megabytes of memory and rival personal digital assistants (pdas) in terms of capabilities. But their real strength comes from operating-system software developed specifically for mobile handsets by the likes of Microsoft, Symbian and PalmSource. These systems make smart phones more flexible and programmable; in short, they make the devices more like a portable PC. New capabilities can be added by simply installing additional software.
3. Take e-mail. Thanks to wireless Internet connections, early smart-phone models allow users to access their office inbox while on the go. E-mail attachments such as Word, Excel or PowerPoint files can even be viewed using models based on Microsoft's Smartphone 2002 OS system. And like pdas, smart phones can be synchronized with PCs, allowing users to conveniently swap everything from archives to address books between their phones and computers.
4. Most early smart phones also include media software, so users can listen to MP3 songs or watch video clips downloaded from the Internet. Samsung is readying its



smart phones for global-positioning-system technology, which would bring maps and real-time location information to the phone's screen. And once the devices have the processing power to run the latest encryption technology, smart phones could finally make good on the much-hyped prospect of secure wireless banking, stock trading and other commercial transactions.

5. There is, however, a classic chicken-egg conundrum. In most countries smart-phone users can't enjoy the full multimedia capabilities of their handsets because they have to make do with existing mobile services that are much too slow and expensive. The category really won't come into its own until operators roll out speedy third-generation (3G) wireless services, like Hutchinson's "3" in Europe. That service has scooped up 60,000 subscribers since it debuted in Italy and Britain, but it's far too early to tell if it will end up either popular or profitable.
6. In the meantime, there's some work to do on the product. For one thing, the first smart phones come at a high price: C300 or C600. Initial models sport crisp color displays that make accessing information more lively. But those big screens—and the need to fit big computing engines inside—make the units bulky compared to normal mobile phones. Lots of screen space also means more cramped control panels. It's clumsy and uncomfortable to input text and navigate programs using the thumb of the hand that's holding the phone. And phone keypads are designed for pushing buttons, not typing, so editing daily diaries or replying to e-mails can be cumbersome. The software side, too, could use an upgrade. Microsoft and Symbian haven't exorcised PC-like demons. For example, smart phones tend to crash—and having to reset a phone after it freezes won't please average users. These are complex devices, and getting the most out of them may require the patience of a geek. The question is, will consumers be willing to pay that price for their smarts?

(Bolande, A.H. (2003, April 14). And it makes phone calls too: The latest phones may be too smart for our own good. Time International, v.161, i 14, p. 57.)



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1. You are preparing a very important presentation using PowerPoint to market a smart phone for your company. You are now at the stage of rehearsing the presentation before delivery. Your manager, Mr. John Smith, wants to make sure your presentation is effective and that you do not face the problems discussed in selection A. Write a **progress** report in which you inform Mr. Smith about the steps you have been following in preparing for your presentation and how you intend to deliver it. While selection B provides information on smart phones, Selection A revolves around the problems an inexperienced person could face when preparing or delivering a PowerPoint presentation. It also implies a certain process which an accomplished presenter would follow in the preparation and delivery of such a presentation. Write your report drawing on the information in the selections, making sure you address the problems that could be encountered when preparing or delivering a PowerPoint presentation. At the same time note that although Mr. Smith asked you to use the software, to an extent he shares the sentiments of Scott McNealy and Bill Wheless towards PowerPoint presentations.

A. While in the stage of preparing the presentation, you had to keep in mind certain considerations concerning your audience, effective design and visuals, and ethical communication, etc. Answer the following questions, which deal with these issues, in the space provided below.

a. You will face an ethical dilemma in your PowerPoint description of some of the smart phone's features. Identify the dilemma, and present 2 ethics-related questions you must consider before presenting your final description of these features. What are the possible consequences of each one of these two questions? (5 pts.)

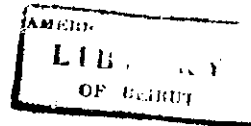
b. Bearing in mind that your presentation should have an effective design, discuss 3 design elements you observed to make your PowerPoint presentation slides more readable and appealing. (5 pts.)

c. Which 3 types of visual aids did you judge as most effective for use in your PowerPoint presentation on the smart phone. Explain briefly how each visual would enhance your presentation. (5pts.)

d. The PowerPoint presentation you are giving is directed to a group of sales agents. Discuss your listeners' purpose and needs. (5 pts.)

B. Write the progress report. (40 pts.)

- a. Use the appropriate format for this situation.
- b. Write your report starting on page 3.



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2. The format, layout and message of the following draft letter need revision. Edit and rewrite this letter on page 7 to make it clear, correct, consistent, courteous, concise, etc. Note that though there are no errors in the information of the inside address or outside address, there may be errors in the format. (40 pts.)

Grandview Residence
Gerald Larson, M. D., President
Grandview, Michigan

June 9, 2003

Mr. Alan Medina
1045 Davis Drive
Grandview, Michigan
U. S. A.

Dear Mr. Larson:

Thank you, Dr. Larson, for your support and encouragement, which I am confident you will continue to provide during the investigation I am proposing here and which I am going to start soon. I hope you find my proposal to your satisfaction. I am pleased to submit to you my proposal here.

As you know, the purpose of my proposed investigation is to find a way to enhance the quality of life for residents. Lack of physical and mental stimulation can seriously undermine the general health and well being of these senior citizens. I hope you find me qualified to conduct such an investigation in spite of my limited experience in the field. I myself am not sure I can complete such a project, but I feel someone should do something about the problem at hand, which has long been neglected. You being the president should be aware of this, and I find that it is my duty to inform you. This negligence is affecting our reputation as leaders in residential care for the aged. However, by finding a cost-efficient means of enriching the miserable lives of those wretched aged residents, which we are supposed to be doing, our above-mentioned reputation will be assured.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Mary Ortiz, for her valuable assistance, and I congratulate you on your management of Grandview Residence. In general, you are a good president! Feel free to contact me if you need anything. I am sure I can help you.

Yours gratefully,
Mr. Alan Medina, Nurse's Aide

Alan Medina



Copy: Proposal